

HB 1383 -- A+ SCHOOLS PROGRAM

SPONSOR: English

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 10 to 3.

Currently, the A+ Schools Program is available only to students who graduate from public high schools that have been designated as A+ schools by making changes to their curriculum and establishing local partnerships with designated stakeholders. This bill expands the program's availability to students of any high school that meet the program requirements.

A student must have attended a high school in Missouri for three years prior to graduation; have graduated from high school with an overall grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale, or an equivalent; have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12; have performed at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring; and have maintained a record of good citizenship and avoidance of the unlawful use of drugs and alcohol.

In order to maintain eligibility for the four-year period of incentive availability, a student must enroll in and attend a Missouri public community college, vocational or technical school, state technical college, or private vocational or technical school; maintain a grade point average of 2.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale, or its equivalent on another scale; and maintain a record of good citizenship and avoidance of the unlawful use of drugs and alcohol.

A student must make a documented good faith effort to first secure all available postsecondary student financial assistance funds that do not require repayment. The financial incentives are subject to appropriation and are available only after all other postsecondary student financial assistance funds have been applied to costs. The awards will be available to reimburse the unpaid balance of the cost of tuition, general fees, and up to 50% of the book cost for a student, in that order.

Missouri institutions of higher education must verify certain information for each student who receives a financial incentive. By the end of the first semester of a student's participation, the institution of higher education must verify that student eligibility has been received from the student's high school of graduation; the eligible student is enrolled full-time; and the student has made a good faith effort to secure all available postsecondary student financial assistance funds. During the second semester, and any subsequent semester, of a student's receipt of financial incentives, the institution of higher

education must verify that: the eligible student continues to be enrolled full-time; the student continues to make good faith efforts to secure all available postsecondary student financial assistance funds; and the student maintains a grade point average of 2.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale.

This bill is similar to HB 451 (2015).

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the fiscal note projection is likely inaccurate as the thought is that only about one third of private school students would use the program. The program has operated as more of a grant program for public schools but it should be more of a scholarship program for the students.

Testifying for the bill were Representative English and the Missouri Catholic Conference.

OPPONENTS: Opponents of the bill say they are not opposed to the underlying notion of the bill, but it could destroy the program and they do not wish to see that happen. It is a realization of the fiscal impact, as the committee discussed already. The concern and uncertainty, when the program was started 13+ years ago, was that there would not be enough funds to continue the program. The people who make use of the program are in such a precarious financial situation that even minor fluctuation can drastically affect their lives and situation.

Testifying for the bill was the Missouri Community College Association.